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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/WHA, DS/ITA/WHA, WHA/CEN, CA/OCS/ACS

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: RECENT SIGNIFICANT CRIME EVENTS

11. (U) SUMMARY: As violent crime continues throughout Guatemala, the following are some of the more recent significant events, including acts against Guatemalan government facilities and personnel, American citizen visitors, Embassy employees, and in residential areas of Embassy personnel. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On July 30, 2009, at approximately 1100 hours, Luis Rene Ibanez, Sub-Director of the El Boqueron prison in Cuilapa, Santa Rosa, was driving near Embassy residences on Vista Hermosa Boulevard in Zone 15 of Guatemala City when he was attacked and killed by AK-47 gunfire from individuals in another vehicle. This appears to have been an assassination and the National Civilian Police (PNC) stated that a gang leader from within the El Boqueron prison is responsible.

13. (U) On July 26, 2009, at approximately 2000 hours, a hand grenade was thrown at a group of off-duty private security guards who were assembled in a public transportation bus parking lot in Zone 5 of Guatemala City. Twelve guards were injured when the grenade exploded. It was reported that the guards were providing security for the buses, and that the company employing them, "Seguridad Profesional Privada", had failed to comply with recent gang extortion threats. Comment: The use of grenades in criminal assaults has been historically uncommon in Guatemala and is of growing concern. End Comment.

14. (SBU) On July 25, 2009, at approximately 1310 hours, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Deputy Director for Guatemala was robbed at gunpoint while walking in Zone 10 of Guatemala City, near Embassy personnel residences. The victim was walking with another CDC employee and both their spouses when a vehicle stopped ahead of them and two passengers exited. All were allowed to pass by the vehicle except the victim, who was threatened with a pistol, patted down, and robbed of a cell phone and cash. The assailants then departed without further incident.

15. (U) On July 21, 2009, at approximately 0100 hours, a grenade was thrown into a residence in Zone 18 of Guatemala City where a party was taking place, killing two and injuring nine people. The PNC has declared that it was related to gang activity.

16. (SBU) On July 20, 2009, at approximately 0900 hours, the fiancée of an Embassy employee was driving in Zone 10 of Guatemala City near Embassy residences when he was assaulted at gunpoint. Two men on motorcycles pulled up on either side of the victim's vehicle, displayed their pistols, and demanded his cell phone. The victim complied and was left physically unharmed. Comment: This is the first assault by motorcycle reported to the Embassy since the new motorcycle law went into effect that prohibits passengers and requires clearly marked license information on their jacket and helmet. End Comment.

¶17. (SBU) On July 20, 2009, at approximately 0900 hours, eight American tourists escorted by two PNC officers were climbing the Acatenango volcano in Chimaltenango when they were assaulted by six armed men with shotguns. The PNC officers attempted to repel the assault and were both shot and wounded by the attackers who subsequently fled without harming the tourists.

¶18. (SBU) On July 19, 2009, at approximately 0120 hours, an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was detonated in front of a PNC substation in Zone 18 of Guatemala City, causing material damage only. Reports indicated that the device materials were similar to those used in commercial explosives for local road construction and excavations, with a parallel cable, Qroad construction and excavations, with a parallel cable, detonator and a car battery as the power source. PNC investigated and reported that it was a dispute between the Mara 18 and MS gangs, with the involvement of one of the substation's former officers.

¶19. (U) On July 18, 2009, at approximately 0900 hours, four American male tourists were climbing the Agua volcano in Sacatepequez when they were assaulted by four men with machetes. The attackers robbed the victims of their belongings and left them physically unharmed.

¶110. (SBU) On July 14, 2009, at approximately 0640 hours, a jogger in Zone 10 and in front of Embassy residences was assaulted at gunpoint when a sedan pulled close and a passenger attempted to rob him of his personal audio device. As the victim resisted and tried to escape, the assailant drew a pistol and fired one round at him. The bullet missed the victim and the assailants drove away without pursuing the victim further. An Embassy employee witnessed and reported the event.

¶111. (SBU) On July 6, 2009, at approximately 1600 hours, a group of nine visiting Americans were climbing the Acatenango volcano in Chimaltenango when they were assaulted by three masked men with shotguns. All the victims were robbed of their valuables. One female victim was taken to another location where the assailant attempted a sexual assault, but the victim immediately fought the assailant and escaped. Once the victims were released, they witnessed the same assailants rob another group of climbers and sexually assault one of the females in that group.

¶112. (U) On June 28, 2009, at approximately 0230 hours, four men in their BMW vehicle received gunfire from assailants in a Land Rover vehicle outside of a nightclub frequented by Embassy personnel and on the same block as the US Animal and Plant Inspection Service facility in Zone 10 of Guatemala City. Two of the victims died and the other two were wounded, all from gunshots.

¶113. (U) Comment: Although these are notable incidents, they are just a small sampling of daily criminal acts in Guatemala. The recent introduction of grenades and IED's, presumably by gangs, is a disturbing trend that will continue to be monitored. In addition, a Consular warden message and RSO security notice has been sent to alert Americans and Embassy staff of the recent criminal events on area volcanoes. McFarland